

## snow goose *Anser caerulescens*

Kingdom: Animalia

Division/Phylum: Chordata

Class: Aves

Order: Anseriformes

Family: Anatidae

ILLINOIS STATUS common, native

### FEATURES

The snow goose is also known as the blue goose. This bird averages 25 to 38 inches in length (tail tip to bill tip in preserved specimen). It has white feathers with black flight feathers. The feet and bill are pink. Orange-red patches may be seen on the head. The immature snow goose has a dark bill and is usually not as brilliant white as the adult. A typical snow goose flock may have white-phase, blue-phase and mixed white and blue birds. The blue phase, or “blue goose,” is a color morph of the snow goose. The blue phase bird has blue-gray feathers, white head feathers and a pink bill and feet. Three of the toes are webbed to help with swimming. The bill is flattened and has a toothlike fringe on its edge to help strain food from the water.

### BEHAVIORS

The snow goose is a common migrant and a common winter resident statewide in Illinois. It is found near water, resting on lakes or feeding in fields. When migrating, these birds fly in a “U” or a large, irregular mass. Spring migration begins in late January and February. The snow goose breeds in the tundra. Fall migrants usually begin to appear in Illinois in mid-October. Most snow geese winter on the western coast of the Gulf of Mexico. This bird eats aquatic plants and seeds. Its call is a high-pitched “yelp” or “whouk.”

### HABITATS

Aquatic Habitats

lakes, ponds and reservoirs; Lake Michigan; rivers and streams; swamps

Woodland Habitats

none

Prairie and Edge Habitats

none

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